

NSE BRIEFING

10 FEB

BACKGROUND

THE UNHAPPY SPARROW

A Sparrow was appointed Eagle.

But no sooner was the appointment made than doubts began to arise.

'Devil knows what made us choose this particular Sparrow—and for Eagle's work too!'

But it was too late. A nest had already been fixed up for him on Eagle Crag. And already a Cuckoo had become his bride—and away.

Our Sparrow sits on Eagle Crag, in an eagle's nest, terrified and very far from home. Not cosy at all.

Some Eagles fly up, beating their great wings. 'We are birds of freedom', they say. 'It's time, brother, time to take flight.'

'Where to?' asks the astonished Sparrow.

The Eagles explain: 'Beyond the far cloud, where the mountain gleams white.'

'Citizens, what do you mean?'

It's alright for Eagles: they just raise their great wings and soar, but he has to thresh and thrash his little wings. What is he getting his keep for? For being there, one might say, by the very peak. It's ^{all} alright for Eagles, they just raise their great wings and soar. But he has to thresh and thrash his little wings. He can scarcely draw breath from one pay-day to another.

Time goes by.

The Eagles are amazed:

'What's this, little brothers? Is this particular Eagle something, as it were, of other than eagle breed?'

One of them tried to work it out: 'This is not an eagle but an embryo eagle. In due course he should grow into an eagle.'

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They wait a month, half a year, a year. It is plain to everybody: no eagle is going to come out of this particular Sparrow. Well, after all, in a big place all sorts are to be found. If one doesn't turn out right, another may.

Our Sparrow ought to be restored to sparrow rank. There would not be a more useful bird anywhere.

But no, it's awkward. He has held acting rank as eagle for a year.

So the poor chap is still doing all he can--amongst the woodpeckers.

COMMENT: This fable is taken from a collection of eight by L. Lagin published in Znamya, May 1954. Znamya is one of the four principal Soviet literary magazines, with a circulation of 130,000.

An understanding of all the overtones and allusions in this fable is not, of course, accessible to the outside student of the USSR, but even so, it can be said with confidence that it expresses keen and widespread feeling on large matters. The Sparrow is a document of special political interest, for it is difficult to see how Russian readers can fail to savour the possibility of a connection between this bird and Malenkov. Kaganovich, in his speech to the railwaymen made on May 8 as published in Pravda on May 24, went out of his way to put Khrushchev before Malenkov, and since then the old 'precedence lists' of the top ten or dozen political leaders have been replaced by recourse to alphabetical sequence. What the Eagles say to the Sparrow is simply a quotation of two lines from a famous poem by Pushkin.